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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000545

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: VIEWS FROM MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

REF: A. RANGOON 514

1B. BANGKOK 2789
1C. CHIANG MAI 115
1D. RANGOON 537

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) On April 24 DATT and P/E Chief had an opportunity to chat at length with Major General Kyaw Win, second in command to General (and Prime Minister) Khin Nyunt as the powerful deputy chief of Burma's military intelligence. The occasion was a social event, but a significant portion of our discussions dealt with political developments in Burma. A few highlights:

--The "Bangkok Process:" General Kyaw Win said that the SPDC had decided to "postpone" participation in the Bangkok Process in order to focus exclusively on reconvening the National Convention on May 17 (refs A and B). He said that the GOB would be willing to return to the table in Bangkok, but did not specify a date. He dismissed speculation that delegates would register for the Convention and then disband for the monsoon season, insisting that the Convention would convene "for at least two months," and suggesting that the SPDC expected nothing less than a fully approved constitution to emerge from the process.

--SPDC-KNU Peace Talks: Kyaw Win also said that the regime had postponed peace talks with the KNU as yet another means to clear the deck for the National Convention (refs C and D). The General played down the importance of the peace talks with regard to forging a new constitution and talked confidently about "dealing" with the KNU at an appropriate time and place.

--The Old Man's Health: Regarding local rumors that SPDC Chairman Than Shwe had recently fallen seriously ill, Kyaw Win said that in fact it was the Senior General's son who had health problems. Kyaw Win said he had been with Than Shwe near Mandalay in mid-April when the Chairman received word that his son had been hospitalized in Rangoon with acute appendicitis. Than Shwe immediately cut short his upcountry travel and his entire delegation returned to Rangoon, setting off a spate of rumors that the Chairman had suffered a stroke (Note: Than Shwe appeared on state-run television on April 27, his first "public" appearance since Burma's April 12-16 water festival period. End note).

--Prime Minister Khin Nyunt: Kyaw Win lamented that his boss at the Office of the Chief of Military Intelligence (OCMI), General Khin Nyunt, was a consummate workaholic who made it a challenge for his subordinates to enjoy leisure time on the weekends. Khin Nyunt convenes a daily briefing with his top advisors every single day of the year at 7:30 a.m., even on holidays and weekends, and spends his "free time" conducting inspections and touring the regime's latest infrastructure projects. The 59 year-old Kyaw Win, an avid tennis player, painter, and photographer, joked that it was part of his job description to get mental and physical exercise on behalf of Khin Nyunt.

¶2. (C) Comment: Although Khin Nyunt retained the military intelligence portfolio after assuming new duties as Prime Minister last August, General Kyaw Win's role increased substantially as the day-to-day manager of the SPDC's vast intelligence network. His remarks on the National Convention, and ongoing efforts to clear the deck before May 17, were yet another indicator that the regime intends to let nothing get in the way of this first step in the Prime Minister's "road map." End comment.
Martinez